

Ref. A084/701

MRS FLANAGAN

cc Mr Stubbs
Miss Dickinson
Mrs M E Brown
Mr Le Cheminant

Freedom of Information Campaign: Sir Douglas Wass

I spoke to Sir Douglas Wass on the afternoon of 2 March about his intention to become an adviser to the 1984 Freedom of Information Campaign.

2. I said that the Campaign was in the realm of political controversy, particularly given the different positions taken by the Prime Minister on the one hand and Leaders of Opposition parties on the other. I had to say from that point of view that I should regret it if Sir Douglas Wass, as a recently retired Permanent Secretary, became involved in the Campaign in the way envisaged. He would certainly make life no easier for his former colleagues still in the Service, and would not do anything to help the image of the Civil Service as a non-political professional body.

3. Sir Douglas Wass was not, however, to be moved. He claimed that the word "adviser" was a misnomer (though I see that it is used in The Times this morning); he suggested that Freedom of Information was an issue which could cross political boundaries; he reminded me that other former Permanent Secretaries (notably Sir Frank Cooper and Sir Patrick Nairne) had taken public positions on Freedom of Information; and he said that he felt that he must be free to enter public debate on issues about which he had views which in conscience he felt it his duty to make known. In further discussion I sought to counter all these points; but, as you will have seen from this morning's newspapers, I was unsuccessful.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

5 March 1984

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